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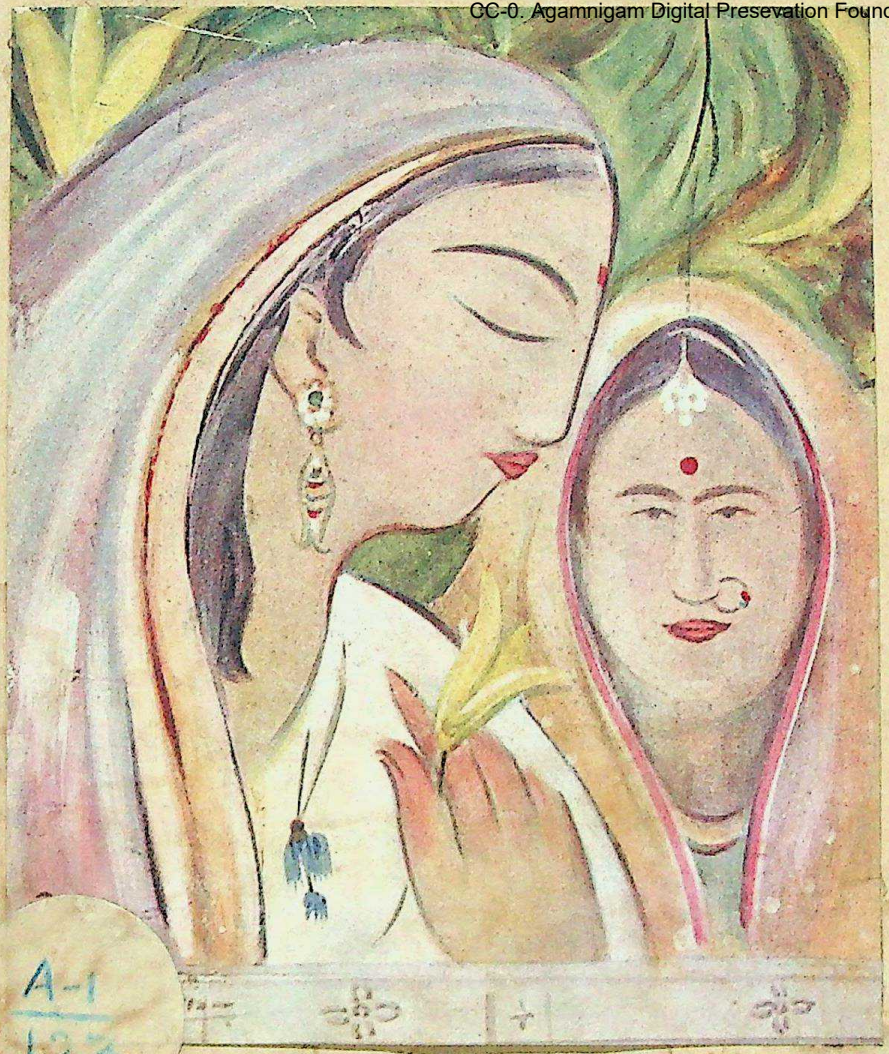

SAILOZ

INTRODUCTION BY
A. S. RAMAN

BHAGMAL DHARAM DAS
NEW DELHI

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ABOUT THE ARTIST

SAILOZ MOOKHERJEA is the most distinguished of the second generation of the Indian painters. *The Studio* has aptly described him as 'one of India's most mature painters'. He was born in 1907 in a gifted family of Calcutta. He had his early art education at the Government School of Art, Calcutta. He held his first one-man show in Calcutta in 1937. Soon he left for Europe with a view to acquainting himself with the latest developments in the art world. During his travels, he met Matisse, attended Cezanne's centenary celebrations (Paris), visited the exhibitions of Cezanne and Van Gogh (Paris), Rembrandt (Amsterdam), Tintoretto (Venice) and Franz Hals (Haarlem), besides several museums and galleries. He has also visited Egypt, Sikkim and Tibet. He held his second one-man show in Calcutta in the late thirties. The verve and vitality running through his works soon evoked tremendous enthusiasm among such eminent artists as Abanindranath Tagore, Ju Peon and Ye Chien wu — the last has drawn a sketch of him which he treasures even to this day —. The retrospective exhibition which he held in October, 1950, covering a period of about twenty years was the finest exhibition that Delhi witnessed in the year. In May, 1951, he exhibited "Confession" (Plate 31) and "Wind" (Plate 32) at the famous Paris exhibition, Salon de Mai in which about three hundred artists from twenty-one countries including masters like Picasso, Rouault and Leger participated.

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SAILOZ MOOKHERJEA

9 COLOUR PLATES AND 30 MONOCHROMES

INTRODUCTION BY

A. S. RAMAN

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DHOOMI MAL DHARAM DAS
NEW DELHI

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My work is dedicated to my grand-mother.

Sailoz

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Artist's Collection

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INTRODUCTION*

Plate 1 SUMMER WELL, 1949
Collection of All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society

AN artist, to my mind, needs no introduction. No amount of writing can introduce him better than his own work. Not even Ananda Coomaraswamy's rhetoric, for instance, can add to what the rhythm of the Nataraja bronze has to say. But still, "the Lord made critics as well as artists", as Coomaraswamy himself tells us, "and they feel bound to get justice done for the works that have touched them most: this necessity which they feel *may* be the means of creating beauty in their own work" (from his letter to Sir William Rothenstein, dated December 29, 1914).

Let us look at a canvas by Sailoz Mookherjea. What do we find there? Emaciated, and yet elegant men and women caught in moods as familiar to us as the colours and patterns of their costumes and set against a landscape full of light and air. A dog here or a child there to add to the animation. Not that Sailoz cannot paint a classical subject. Far from it. But certainly not in a classical manner. (*Kiss* Plate 10), for example,

**Based on my articles in various journals, Indian as well as foreign, and my thanks are due to the editors of these.*

A. S. R.

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Plate 2 DUTCH GIRL, 1937 Artist's Collection

which in spite of its stylistic affinities with the Ecole de Paris is actually based on the exquisite erotic sculpture at Konarak. *Kiss* is a very happy example of what happens when there is a living contact between a 'modernist' and his own heritage and here we have the key to an understanding of Sailoz, who is as much a product of his time as of his tradition.

Sailoz is, perhaps, not a great artist, because he is not old enough—he is only 44—. How can he be great in a country where greatness is measured in terms of age ? I sometimes wonder what would have happened to Masaccio, Raphael, Seurat and Modigliani, if they were born in India. What would have happened ? What happened to Amrita Sher Gil would have happened to them too. In 1940, a year before her death, she writes : "I am starving for appreciation, literally famished. My work is understood and liked less and less, as time goes on".

Sailoz is a great artist all the same. It is a pity that he has not had a fair assessment in his own country. He is great for many reasons. He is great, for instance, because he is sincere. He is great, because he is master of his technique. He is great, because he is intensely aware of a sense of tradition as well as freedom. He is great, because

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he understands the full significance of modern movement which has been in progress since the latter half of the last century. But—let us remember—when he paints, what he attempts to do is not to demonstrate an abstract theory but to present, like Amrita Sher Gil, his own country and his own people as he sees them. The India that emerges in his hands is as intimately Indian as the India we all love, whatever be the forms to wh'ch he may reduce her.

The comparison between Sailoz Mookherjea and Amrita Sher Gil is appropriate. Both the artists have drawn their inspiration, not from the mere externals of our great masterpieces of the past, to which the Bengal School has unfortunately confined itself, but from the spirit behind them. Both have painted the India throbbing around them. Both have resorted to emotive distortion in order to emphasize the essentially romantic element in their subjects. The difference between the two artists is the same as that between Modigliani and Matisse. Sher Gil is sombre and serene and Sailoz sweet and suave.

Sailoz has learnt much from Matisse, indeed, but more, much more, from Kangra Kalam and folk art. To Matisse, he owes his crispness, to Kangra Kalam, his lyricism and to folk art, his directness,

Plate 3 HOMEWARD, 1950 Artist's Collection

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Plate 4 RETURN, 1948 Collection of Mrs A. E. Charlton

all seen to very good effect in *Blossoms* (Plate 21). Sailoz has very few equals in India in his handling of oil medium and here lies the secret of his lucidity and luminosity, to which even his earliest work reproduced in this monograph, *Village Puja* (Plate 6) bears eloquent testimony. Note also the white horse in *Market Place* (Plate 29) against white background which experts consider a *tour de force*. One of Sailoz's pet preoccupations, as in *Siesta* (Plate 23) and *Balcony* (Plate 28), is with perspective. *Balcony* is, incidentally, a typical example of a familiar theme in an unfamiliar treatment—*Kiss*, as has already been mentioned, is another—. *Balcony* depicting the familiar Nayika motif is, in its spirit, at once reminiscent of a Rajput miniature. But its language is different. Its landscape and figures are not, as in a Rajput miniature, stylized. Stylization is one of the most serious defects of the Bengal School. Not that stylization is bad in itself. But whatever could be said on it had been said and, most eloquently at that, long before the Bengal School was thought of. An artist who settles down to facile formulas and comfortable moulds is as good as dead. No form is final for him and no colour. His is an eternal quest.

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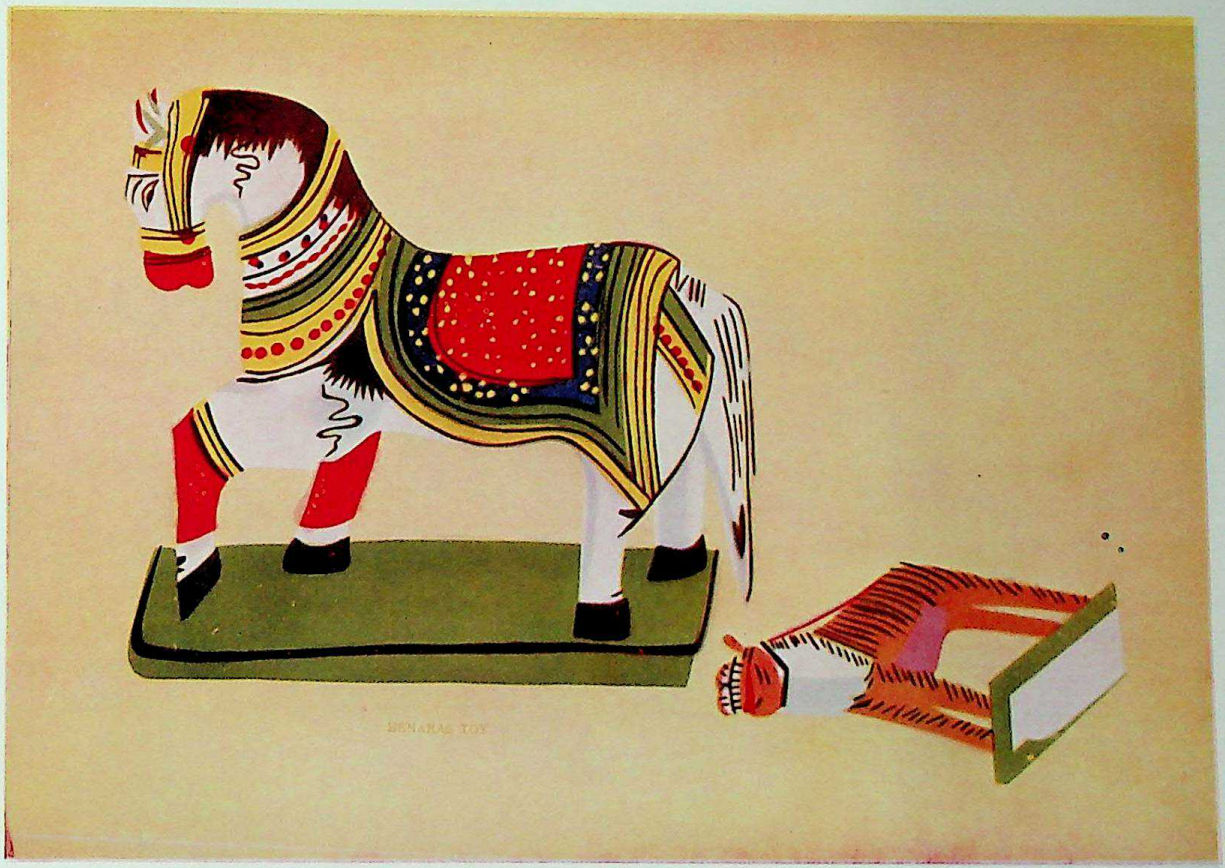

Plate 5 STILL LIFE, 1937 Collection of Messrs Dhoomi Mal Dharam Das

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To Sailox, landscape, still life and portraiture are not ends in themselves. But, at the same time, he has an instinct for all these. The landscape in his pictures has an almost impressionistic freshness and vibrancy that is irresistible. As regards his figures, *Dutch Girl* (Plate 2), *Homeward* (Plate 3) and *Return* (Plate 4) are among the finest examples of modelling I have ever seen, subtle and sensitive The jug in *Dream* (Plate 13) is an excellent still life. It has a character of its own.

A little known fact about Sailoz Mookherjea is his masterly compilation of the Orissan, Banaras and other forms of folk art under the somewhat ambitious title, *Folk Art of India* (Dhoomi Mal Dharam Das, Rs. 25), from which a Banaras toy (Plate 5) is reproduced.

Before I conclude, I may perhaps answer a few criticisms which are generally made against Sailoz. One is that he is 'derivative of the French moderns'. 'Derivative' is a very convenient term. You can apply it to any artist you do not like. To quote George Keyt, "About my being 'derivative'? The same then could be said of Matisse, Picasso, (particularly Picasso !) Braque, and even the old boys like Raphael, Rubens, El Greco, etc., and Indian sculptors and painters—heavens !—'derivative' would be far too mild a term to use" (from a letter to the author).

Another criticism is that Sailoz distorts. Our ancestors also distorted. While every 'modernist' distorts, every distortionist is not a 'modernist'. Bad drawing also results in distortion. And Sailoz knows his drawing. Example : *Lost Face* (Plate 36).

The criticism that Sailoz's work lacks intellect is, I am afraid, difficult to answer. This much is, however, certain : Sailoz is not an artist who will rest content with obsolete mannerisms and convenient cliches, though he may not have the intellectual curiosity which we associate with the Ecole de Paris. After all Paris is Paris and India India.

A. S. RAMAN

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Plate 6 VILLAGE PUJA, 1933 Collection of H. H. The Maharaja of Patiala

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Plate 7 LANE IN ITALY, 1937 Collection of Sri B. M. Birla

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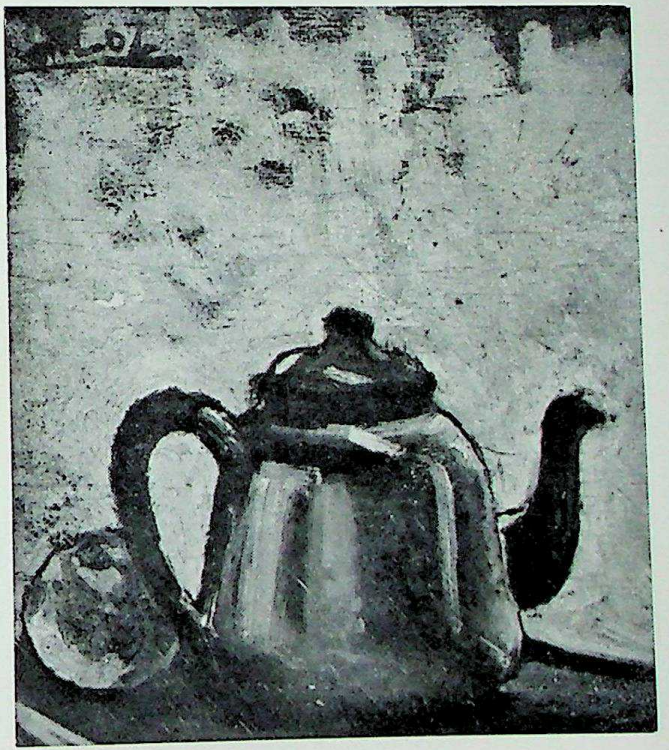

Plate 8 TEA POT, 1938 Artist's Collection

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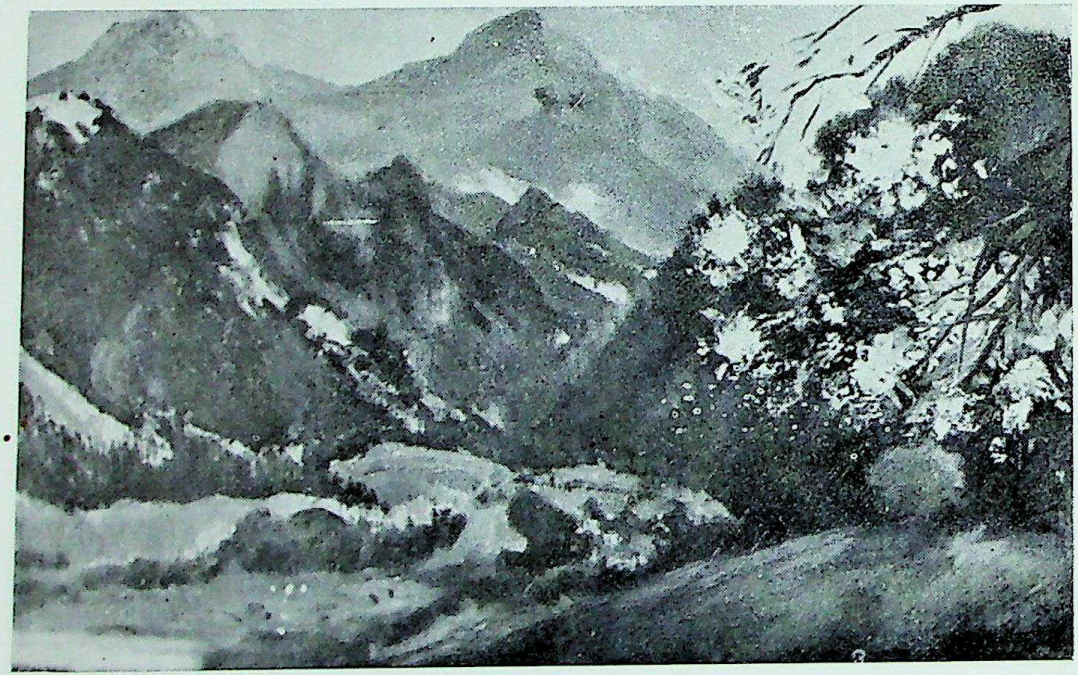

Plate 9 SIKKIM GLORY, 1939 Collection of Sri B. C Dutt

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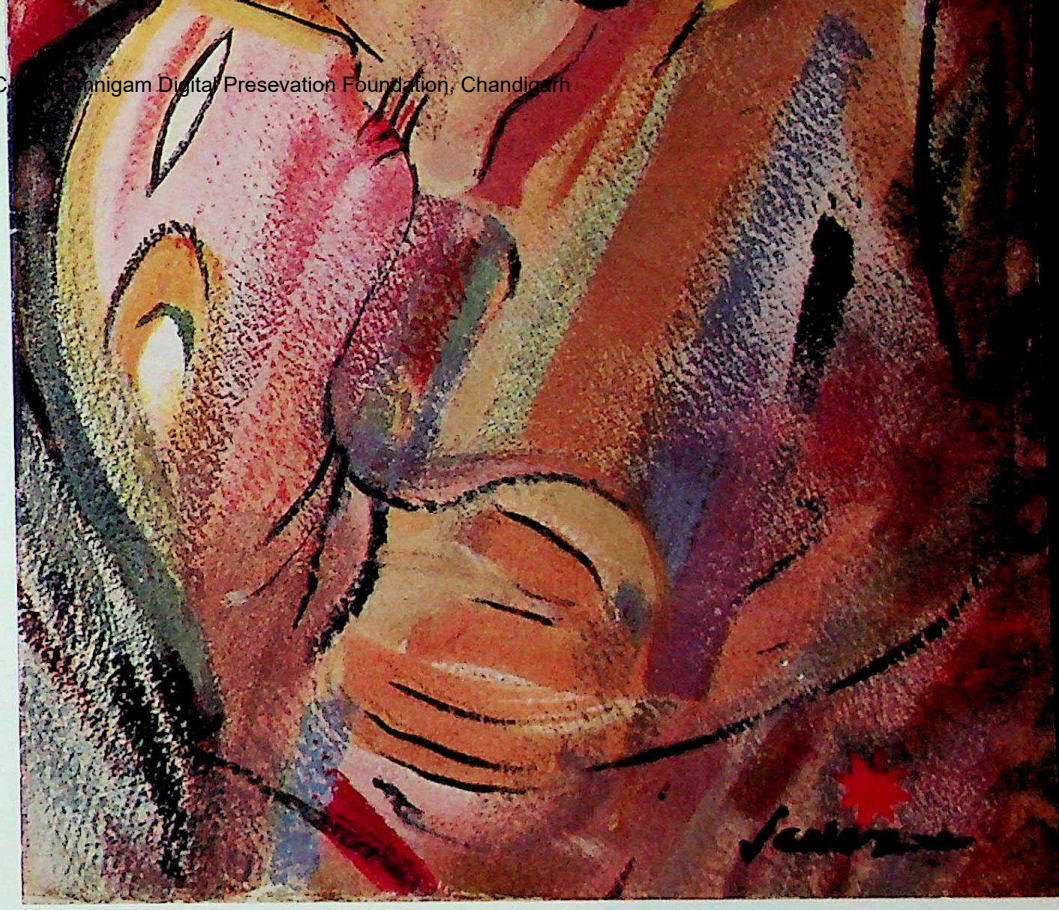

Plate 10 KISS, 1945 Collection of Srimati Asha Pant

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Plate 11 SONG OF FREEDOM, 1945 Collection of Sri Rallia Ram

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Plate 12
MOTHER, 1945
Collection of Sri J. M. Mazumdar

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Plate 13 DREAM, 1945 Private Collection

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Plate 14 THE MOSQUE, 1945 Collection of Sri M. S. Randhawa, I.C.S.

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Plate 15 HARVEST, 1947 Collection of M. Francis Brunel, France

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Plate 16 FOREST FLAME, 1948 Collection of George Candreava, Esq., U. S. A.

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Plate 17 BROWN BELLE, 1948 Collection of Sri J. N. Sahni

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Plate 18
DOLL SELLER, 1948
Collection of Kumar P. N. Tagore

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Plate 19 ARISTOCRAT, 1948 Collection of Lady Ranu Mukerjee

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Plate 20

BUFFALOES' HOLIDAY, 1948

Collection of Indian Agricultural Research Institute, Government of India

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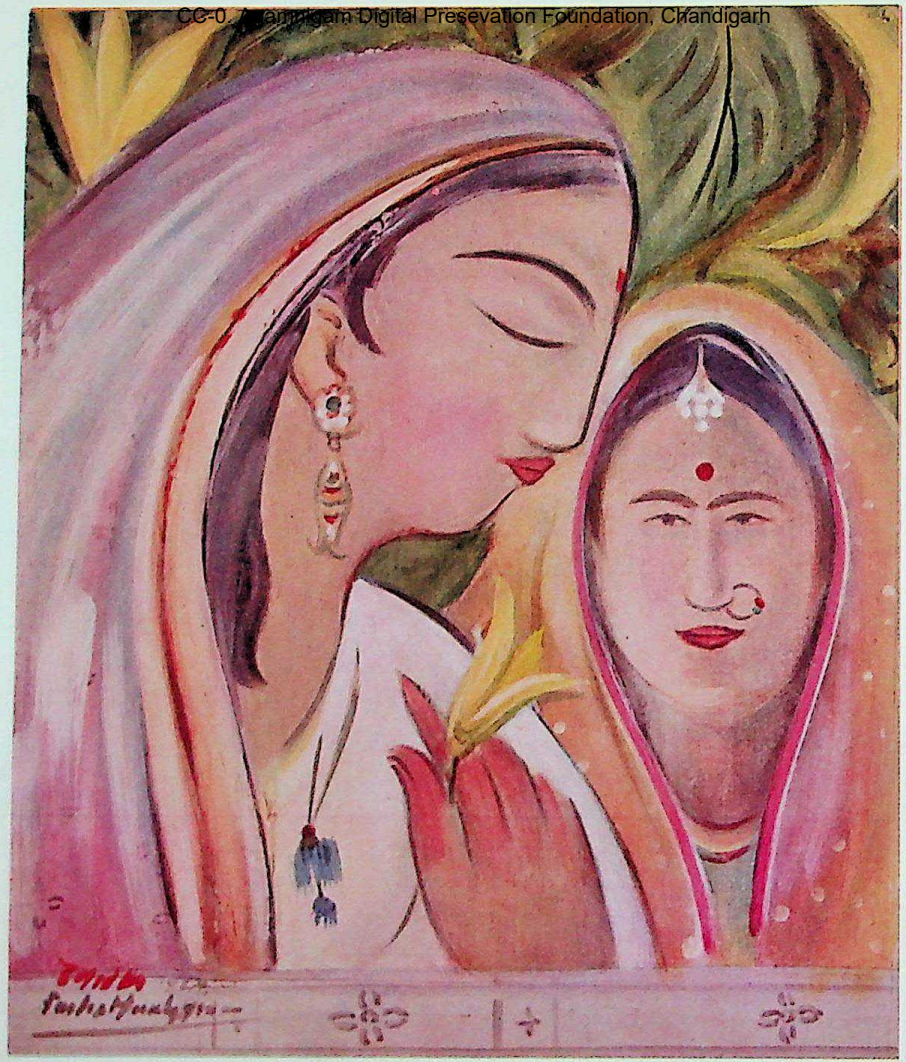

Plate 21 BLOSSOMS, 1948 Collection of Sri A. S. Raman

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Plate 22 TOILET, 1949 Collection of Sri S. P. Varma

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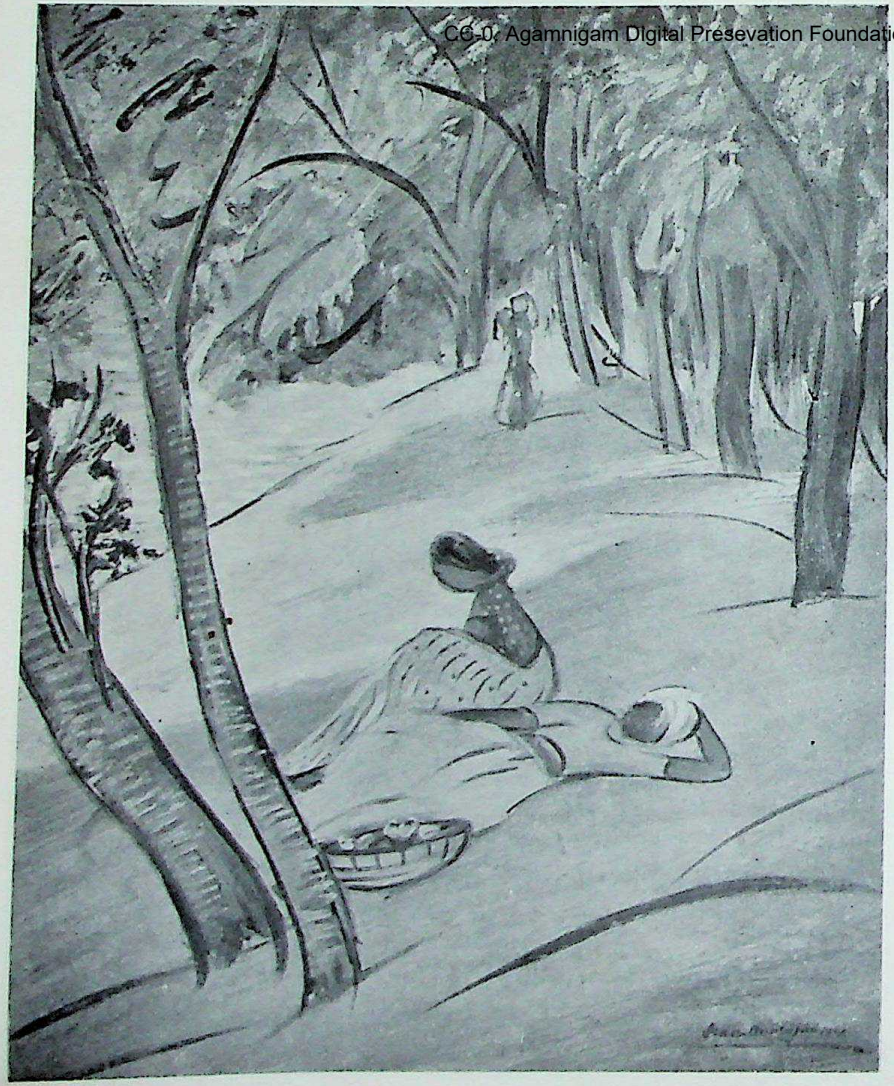

Plate 23
SIESTA, 1949
Collection of Henry B. Keep, Esq., U S.A.

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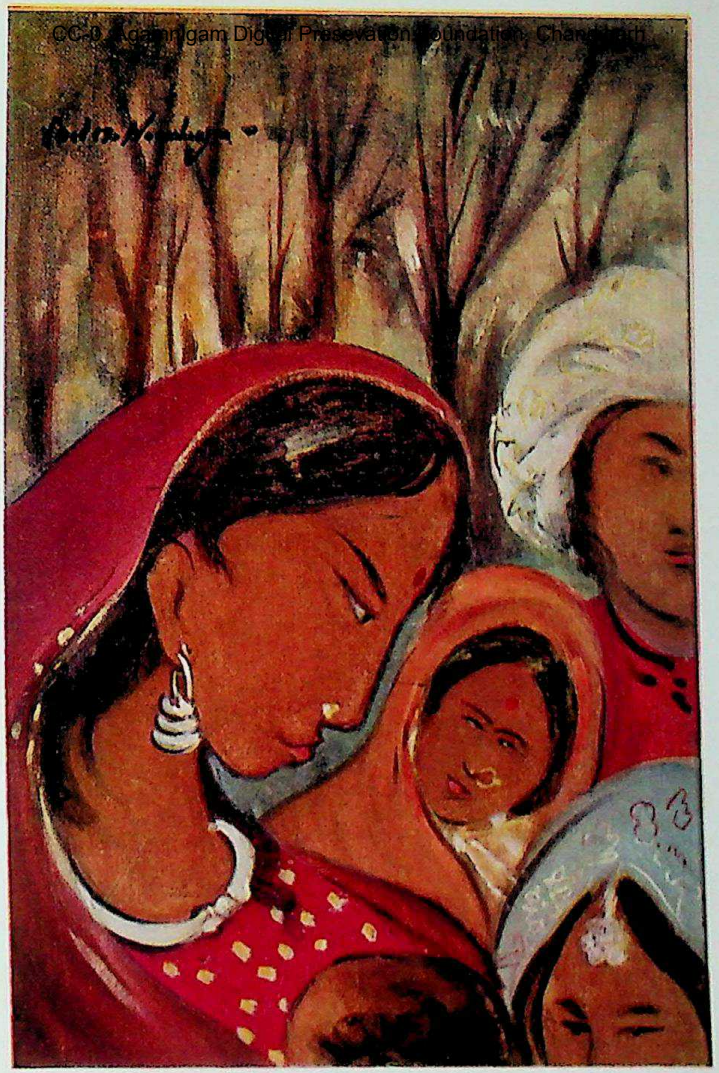

Plate 24
OUR PEOPLE, 1949
Collection of Sri B. K. Dilwali

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Plate 25 BATHING DAY, 1949
Collection of Mrs. Frank Roberts, U. K

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Plate 26 WASHING DAY, 1949 Collection of Sri P. C. Chaudhuri, I.C.S.

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Plate 27 DRUMMER, 1949 Private Collection

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Plate 28 BALCONY, 1950 Collection of Srimati Gita Banerjee

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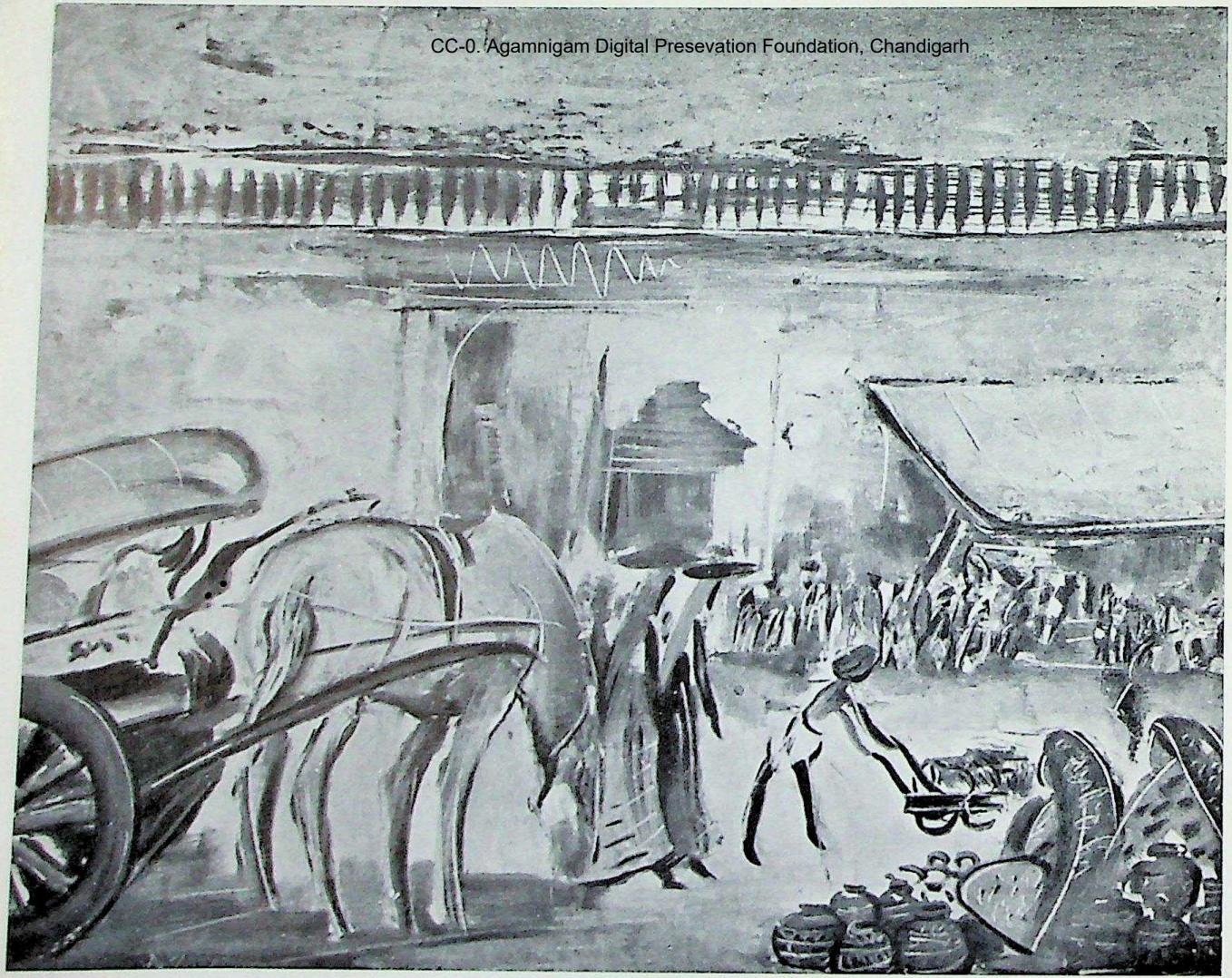

Plate 29 MARKET PLACE, 1950 Collection of Miss Elizabeth Robb, U. S A.

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Plate 30 SHAHNAI, 1950 Collection of M. Christian Behe, France

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Plate 31 CONFESSION, 1950 Collection of Sri S. K. Banerjee, I.C.S.

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Plate 32 WIND, 1950 Collection of M. Claude Journot, France

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Plate 31 BANANA, 1950 Artist's Collection

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Plate 34 ROZA AMIR KHUSRO, 1950
Collection of Phillip Lassage, Esq., U. S. A.

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Plate 35 SUMMER NIGHT, 1950 Collection of Martin Russell, Esq.

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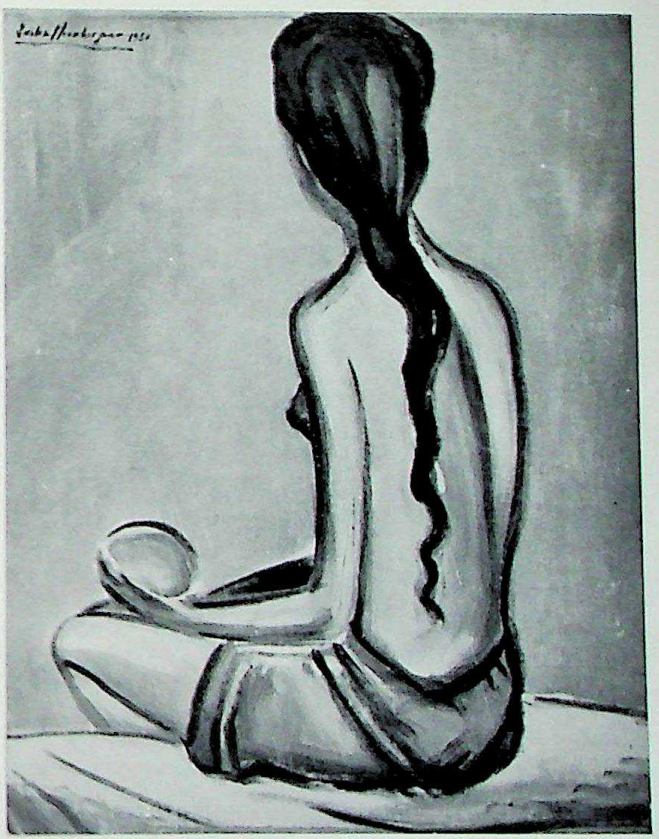

Plate 36 LOST FACE, 1950 Artist's Collection

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Plate 37
SOUTH BELLE, 1950,
Artist's Collection

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Plate 38
STREAM, 1950
Collection of N. L. Emmerson, Esq

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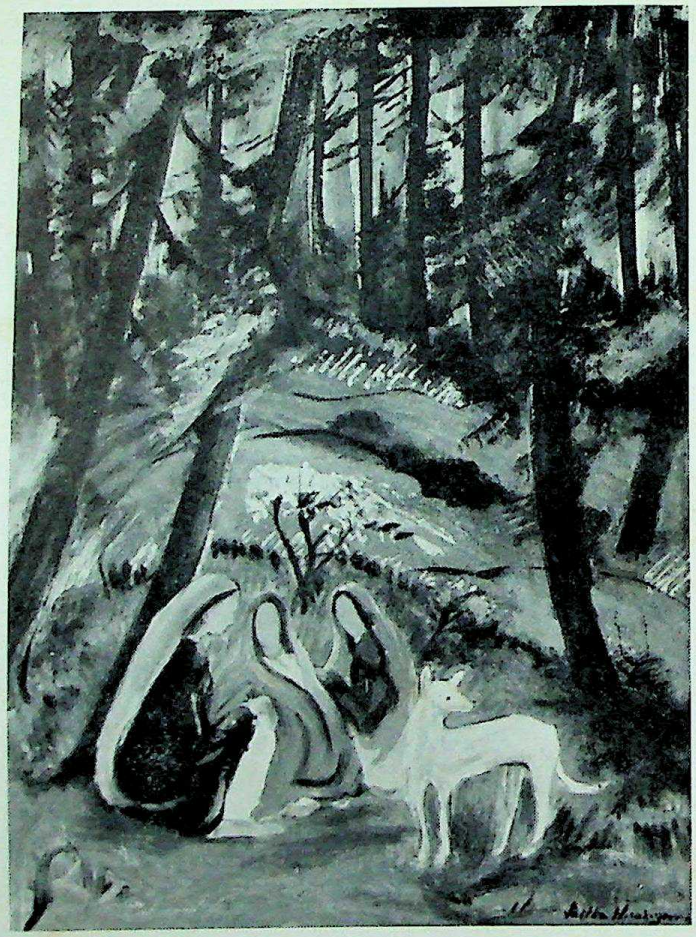

Plate 39 LONELY PINES, 1951 Artist's Collection

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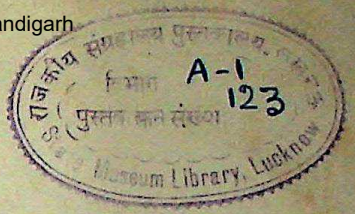

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

A. S. RAMAN is the most distinguished of the younger Indian art critics. He addresses himself essentially to an international audience. His articles have appeared in many first class journals in the U. K., France, U.S.A., Australia, Ceylon and India, the more distinguished of which are : *The Studio, World Review, Contemporary Review, Art Fortnightly, Meanjin and The Statesman.* His views have a freshness and forthrightness that is rare in Indian art criticism. The things he has said about the Indian revivalist movement had never been said before.

Raman, who is *Marg's* art critic in Delhi, was a member of the Selection Committee for the Indian Section of the 1951 Salon de Mai (Paris)

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